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Most people in Gaza are displaced, as families are forced to move repeatedly in search of safety. Lack of food, basic survival items, and poor hygiene further exacerbate people's dire living conditions, amplify protection and mental health issues, and increase the spread of disease. Photo by UNICEF/El Baba

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Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #78

27 Dec 2023

Key points

- Following a shutdown of the telecommunications and internet services in Gaza on 26 December, services are being gradually restored to all areas of Gaza on 27 December. The frequent disruption in communications, along with intensified hostilities, insecurity, blocked roads, and scarcity of fuel, pose significant challenges to humanitarian operations.

- On 27 December, heavy Israeli bombardment from air, land, and sea, continued across most of the Gaza Strip. In the north, Gaza City and Jabalya were most affected; in the Middle Area, hostilities continued in the four refugee camps – Al Bureij, An Nuseirat, Deir Al Balah and Al Maghazi. Simultaneously, Israeli forces struck multiple targets in the southern cities of Khan Yunis and Rafah. Intense ground operations and fighting between Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups also continued in most areas, except for Rafah, as did the firing of rockets by Palestinian armed groups into Israel.

- Between 26 and 27 December, 195 Palestinians were reportedly killed, and another 325 people were injured, according to the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Gaza. Between the afternoons of 26 and 27 December, no Israeli

soldiers were reported killed in Gaza.* Since the start of the ground operation, 162 soldiers have been killed, and 898 soldiers have been injured in Gaza, according to the Israeli military.

- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), as of 27 December, 13 out of Gaza's 36 hospitals are partially functional; nine in the south and four in the north. The four hospitals partially functional in the north have been offering maternity, trauma, and emergency care services. However, they face challenges such as a shortage of medical staff, including specialized surgeons, neurosurgeons, and intensive care staff, as well as a lack of medical supplies such as anesthesia, antibiotics, pain relief medicines, and external fixators. Additionally, they have an urgent need for fuel, food, and drinking water. The nine partially functional hospitals in the south are operating at three times their capacity, while facing critical shortages of basic supplies and fuel. According to the MoH in Gaza, occupancy rates are now reaching 206 per cent in inpatient departments and 250 per cent in intensive care units.

- On 25 December, a team from the WHO visited Al Aqsa Hospital, in the Middle Area, where many of the injured from the strike on Al Mahghazi Camp were taken, to assess the situation, and heard "harrowing accounts" shared by health workers and patients alike. On 27 December, the WHO Director-General appealed to the international community "to take urgent steps to alleviate the grave peril facing the population of Gaza and jeopardizing the ability of humanitarian workers to help people with terrible injuries, acute hunger, and at severe risk of disease."

- According to the MoH in Gaza, between 7 October and 00:00 on 28 December, at least 21,110 Palestinians were killed in Gaza. About 70 per cent of those killed are said to be women and children. As of 27 December, 55,243 Palestinians have been injured. Many people are missing, presumably buried under the rubble, with many still waiting for rescue or recovery.

Hostilities and casualties (Gaza Strip)

- The following are among the deadliest incidents reported on 27 December:
  - On 26 December, at around 18:45, the Israeli air force reportedly struck a house in An Nuseirat camp, Middle Gaza, killing at least five Palestinians, including children, and injuring others.
  - On 26 December, at about 20:00, media sources reported that Israeli forces struck a three-storey building in the vicinity of Al Azhar University in Gaza city; as a result, more than 60 people are reported missing.
  - On 27 December, in the morning, six Palestinians were reportedly killed by Israeli snipers in the Al Saftawi area, Gaza city; the bodies were transferred to Al Shifa Hospital.
  - On 22 December, local media sources reported that Israeli forces killed nine Palestinian men from the Al Khaldi family in Ash Sheikh Redwan neighborhood in Gaza city. According to information received from relatives of those who were allegedly killed, on 21 December, at about 18:00, Israeli Forces raided the family house, where around 35 persons, including women and children, where sheltering, and fired randomly at people in the living room, killing at least nine men and injuring others.

- On 26 December, the bodies of 80 Palestinians reportedly killed in northern Gaza were returned through the Kerem Shalom crossing to the local authorities and buried in a mass grave in Rafah. According to Israeli media, the bodies had reportedly been taken to Israel for inspection, to determine whether any of them were hostages.

- According to Ministry of Education, between 7 October and 26 December, more than 4,037 students and 209 educational staff were killed, and more than 7,259 students and 619 teachers were injured in Gaza.

- According to the Palestinian Journalist Syndicate in Gaza, 103 Palestinian journalists and media workers have been killed in airstrikes since 7 October. According to the Gaza MoH, 311 Palestinian medics have been killed. According to the Palestinian Civil Defense at least 40 civil defense members have been killed since the start of hostilities.

Displacement (Gaza Strip)

- On 27 December, at about 9:15, Israeli forces reportedly struck the UNRWA Preparatory School for Girls in Al Maghazi camp, Middle Gaza, killing at least five Palestinians, and injuring several others. The school was sheltering internally displaced people (IDP) and was evacuated following the strike.

- On 26 December, the Israeli military reiterated its call upon residents to leave an area, originally designated for evacuation on 22 December, covering about 15 per cent, or roughly nine square kilometres, of Deir Al Balah governorate in central Gaza. Before the onset of hostilities, it was home to nearly 90,000 people, and it now includes six shelters that have accommodated about 61,000 IDPs, mostly from the north. The affected areas include Al Bureij and An Nuseirat Refugee Camps and north of An Nuseirat (Az Zaharaa, and Al Moughraga). Instructions accompanying the online map call on residents to move immediately to shelters in Deir al Balah, which is already overcrowded, hosting several hundred thousand IDPs. The scope of displacement resulting from this evacuation order remains unclear.

- Obtaining an accurate figure of the total number of IDPs remains challenging. According to UNRWA, 1.9 million people in Gaza, or nearly 85 per cent of the population, are estimated to be internally displaced, including people who have been displaced multiple times, as families are forced to move repeatedly in search of safety.Lack of food, basic survival items, and poor hygiene, further exacerbate the already dire living conditions of IDPs, amplify protection and mental health issues, and increase the spread of disease.

Electricity

- Since 11 October, the Gaza Strip has been under an electricity blackout, after the Israeli authorities cut off the electricity supply, and fuel reserves for Gaza's sole power plant were depleted. For more information on electricity supply to the Gaza Strip, please see this dashboard.

Health care, including attacks (Gaza Strip)

- On 26 December, at about 15:30, Israeli forces reportedly struck and destroyed an UNRWA medical clinic in Beit Hanoun, northern Gaza. No report of civilian casualties.

- On 26 December, at about 20:50, The Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) reported that it had lost communication with its teams working in Gaza, due to the disruption of telecommunications and internet services. PRCS also reported that the VHF radio communication network, the sole means of communication during this blackout, sustained damage from alleged artillery shelling that targeted the upper floors of its headquarters in Khan Younis, southern Gaza, in the early morning of 26 December. In reference to the incident, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) declared that "humanitarian workers, vehicles and buildings must be protected during conflict. They provide lifesaving assistance and must be able to conduct their work safely."

Food security

- The Chief Economist of the World Food Programme (WFP) has noted that the scale and speed of the unfolding acute food insecurity situation in Gaza, observed over just two months, are unprecedented in their severity. The entire population in the Gaza Strip faces an imminent risk of famine, according to the latest estimates from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) global partnership on 21 December. The proportion of households affected by acute food insecurity is the largest ever recorded globally, according to IPC report.

- The Famine Review Committee (FRC), activated due to evidence surpassing the acute food insecurity Phase 5 (Catastrophic threshold) in the Gaza Strip, warns that the risk of famine increases daily amid intense conflict and restricted humanitarian access. The committee added that to eliminate the famine risk, it is imperative to halt the

deterioration of health, nutrition, food security, and mortality through the restoration of health and WASH services. In addition, the cessation of hostilities and the restoration of humanitarian space for delivering multisectoral assistance are vital first steps to eliminate any risk of famine.

Hostilities and casualties (Israel)

- Over 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals have been killed in Israel, including 36 children, according to the Israeli authorities, the vast majority on 7 October.

- During the humanitarian pause (24-30 November), 86 Israeli and 24 foreign national hostages were released. The Israeli authorities estimate that about 129 Israelis and foreign nationals remain captive in Gaza. On 22 December, the UN Secretary-General reiterated his call for all remaining hostages to be released immediately and unconditionally.

Violence and casualties (West Bank)

- On 27 December, clashes erupted with Palestinians after Israeli forces raided Nur Shams Refugee Camp, Tulkarm, which reportedly included the use of explosives by the former. Israeli forces killed six Palestinians, including two children, and injured two others by rockets fired from a drone.

- Another Palestinian man died from wounds he sustained from Israeli forces during an operation in Tulkarm Refugee Camp on 14 November.

- Since 7 October, 300 Palestinians, including 79 children, have been killed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Additionally, two Palestinians from the West Bank were killed while carrying out an attack in Israel on 30 November. Of those killed in the West Bank, 292 were killed by Israeli forces, eight by Israeli settlers and another two either by forces or settlers. This toll represents nearly 60 per cent of all Palestinians killed in the West Bank this year. With a total of 502 Palestinians killed in the West Bank, 2023 is the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank since OCHA began recording casualties in 2005.

- Since 7 October, four Israelis, including three members of the Israeli forces, have been killed in attacks by Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Another four Israelis were killed in an attack by Palestinians from the West Bank in West Jerusalem (one of the four was killed by Israeli forces who misidentified him).

- Seventy-one per cent of the Palestinian fatalities in the West Bank since 7 October have occurred during search-and-arrest and other operations carried out by Israeli forces, including some – mainly in Jenin and Tulkarm governorates – involving exchanges of fire with Palestinians. Half of the fatalities were reported in operations that did not involve armed clashes.

- Since 7 October, Israeli forces have injured 3,805 Palestinians, including at least 576 children; 51 per cent in the context of search-and-arrest and other operations and 41 per cent of them in the context of demonstrations. Another 91 Palestinians have been injured by settlers and 12 other Palestinians injured either by Israeli forces or settlers. Some 33 per cent of those injuries have been caused by live ammunition, compared with 9 per cent in the first nine months of 2023.

Settler Violence

- Since 7 October, OCHA has recorded 367 Israeli settler attacks against Palestinians, resulting in Palestinian casualties (36 incidents), damage to Palestinian-owned property (285 incidents), or both casualties and damage to property (46 incidents).

- The weekly average of incidents since 7 October stands at 32, compared with 21 incidents per week between 1 January and 6 October 2023. The number of incidents since 7 October has declined from 80 incidents in the first week (7-14 October) to 11 incidents between 16 and 22 December. One-third of these incidents included firearms, including shootings and threats of shootings. In nearly half of all recorded incidents, Israeli forces were either accompanying or reportedly seen as supporting the attackers.

Displacement (West Bank)

- Since 7 October, at least 198 Palestinian households comprising 1,208 people, including 586 children, have been displaced amid settler violence and access restrictions. The displaced households are from at least 15 herding/Bedouin communities. More than half of the displacements occurred on 12, 15, and 28 October, affecting seven communities.

- On 26 December, three Palestinian families were forced to demolish their residential structures in Jabal al Mukkabir and Shu'fat (both in East Jerusalem) to avoid the payment of fines imposed by Israeli authorities due to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are almost impossible to obtain. As a result, seven people, including four children, were displaced.

- This brings the total number of people displaced following the demolition of their homes, due to lack of Israeli issued permits, to 393 Palestinians, including 208 children, due to lack of Israeli-issued building permits in Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which are almost impossible to obtain. The monthly average of displacement in this context between 7 October and 7 December represents a 27 per cent increase compared with the monthly average of displacement in the first nine months of the year.

- A total of 19 homes have been demolished on punitive grounds since 7 October, resulting in the displacement of 95 Palestinians, including 42 children. This figure is higher than the 16 homes punitively demolished in the first nine months of the year, resulting in the displacement of 78 Palestinians. The Human Rights Committee, in its review of the fourth periodic report of Israel, in 2014, concluded that punitive demolitions are a form of collective punishment and as such are illegal under international law.

- Another 483 Palestinians, including 222 children, have been displaced since 7 October following the destruction of 73 residential structures during other operations carried out by Israeli forces across the West Bank; 55 per cent of the displacement was reported in Jenin Refugee Camp, and 39 per cent in Nur Shams and Tulkarm Refugee Camps (both in Tulkarm).

Funding

- As of 27 December, Member States have disbursed US$637 million against the updated Flash Appeal launched by the UN and its partners to implement its response plan in support of 2.2 million people in the Gaza Strip and 500,000 in the West Bank. This constitutes 52 per cent of the $1.2 billion requested. Private donations are collected through the Humanitarian Fund.

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS AND RESPONSES: 18-25 December

Health

- Eight out of 22 UNRWA health centres are still operational south of Wadi Gaza, recording 10,095 patient visits on 21 December, including refugees and non-refugees.

- Midwives are providing care for post-natal and high-risk pregnant women at the eight operational health centres. On 21 December, 221 post-natal and high-risk pregnancy cases were attended to.

- UNRWA continues to provide health care to IDPs at shelters through 97 medical teams. Each team comprises one or two doctors and a nurse. On 21-22 December, UNRWA medical teams attended to 21,004 IDPs.

- On 20-21 December, mental health, and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services were resumed in the Middle Area and Khan Younis governorates, with a team of two psychiatrists and 16 counsellors and supervisors to assist special cases referred from health centres and shelters.

Food security

- Between 18 and 24 December, the Food Security Sector reached 1,783,565 people. Given that it aims at reaching Gaza's 2.2 million people daily, this represents 12 per cent of the target.

- Amid immense access challenges, 800 people in the north, including IDPs residing in public shelters and those with host families, received food parcels. Additionally, 780 hot meals were provided in northern Gaza.

- In southern Gaza, food parcels reached 268,333 people in UNRWA shelters, 2,800 in public shelters, 23,841 staying with host families, and 1,000 who are not displaced. In addition, 53,000 hot meals were distributed to people in public shelters and host families; ready-to-eat rations were provided to 3,500 people in similar circumstances; and flour distribution benefited 1,722,792 people.

- Additionally, between 23-26 December, the World Food Programme (WFP) provided 18,822 people outside shelters with food parcels through partner distribution points. It also provided about 500,000 IDPs in UN shelters south of Wadi Gaza with food parcels, wheat flour, high-energy biscuits and lipid-based nutrient supplements. Additionally, it provided 16,420 hot meals in Rafah, the Middle Area, and Gaza city through five community-led kitchens. Finally, 50 metric tons of wheat flour are scheduled for dispatch to 14 bakeries.

Education

- The Education Cluster reported that 352 schools have sustained damage across the Gaza Strip, affecting the education of 400,700 students (52.1 per cent girls). Three governorates (Gaza, Khan Younis and North Gaza) are highly affected, accounting for 74 per cent of the total damage. About 90 per cent of school buildings are being utilized as shelters by IDPs and/or sustained damage, with the severity of damage varying from minor (128 schools), moderate (110 schools), major (96 schools) and destruction (8 schools).

- The Education Cluster's 10 partners currently active in Gaza have reached 84,262 students and teachers since 7 October, with the provision of emergency learning and recreational supplies (52,653 reached), psychosocial support (64,854 reached), and recreational activities (83,262 reached), south of Wadi Gaza.

Nutrition

Nutrition partners provided the following essential to prevent and or cure malnutrition among children and mothers:

- Juzoor reached 21,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women with iron-foliate and multiple micronutrients supplementation in Rafah and the Middle Area.

- UNICEF delivered lipid-based supplements covering the needs of 11,200 children (ages 6-24 months) inside shelters for one month.

- UNICEF delivered ready-to-use infant formulas to address the needs of 400 non-breastfed infants (ages up to 5 months) for one month.

Multi-purpose Cash Assistance (MCPA)

- Since the beginning of hostilities, nearly 110,000 households (comprising almost 750,000 people) have received emergency MPCA. With about 80,000 households having already cashed out their assistance, cash out rates stand at 73 per cent, and are declining slightly.

- While distribution has been delivered across the Gaza Strip, the vast majority is now concentrated in the southern governorates.

- While formal markets are largely depleted, informal markets are now the key sources of basics goods and services. This includes trades of personal belongings, small household-based production (bread, vegetables), humanitarian assistance, and other items.

- Post distribution monitoring data from recipients of cash assistance point to food, medicines, debt repayment, drinking water, and transportation as the top expenditures reported. The percentage of expenditures on food has further decreased over the past weeks, while the percentage of expenditures on medicines has doubled. Some 70 per cent of respondents report that unrestricted cash has helped them access needed goods and services, either fully or partially, while 87 per cent report unrestricted cash as their preference for future assistance.

Logistics

- The results of the rapid , conducted by the Global Logistics Cluster, HELP Logistics, JSI, and partners, have been shared with partners. The assessment was conducted during November and December through field visits to 23 locations in Khan Yunis and Rafah governorates.

- The IMPACCT Working Group continues to engage with various ministries for clarifications on customs procedures for the importation of humanitarian aid. The Standard Operating Procedures on the importation processes are under development.

- The Logistics Cluster continues to facilitate access to common services in the Gaza Strip and Egypt through common storage services, road transport to the storage location, and cargo notification transshipment services. In Gaza, two warehouses in Rafah are currently available for partners' storage, one managed by ACTED (70 square metres) and one by WFP (1,000 square metres). The common warehouses in Deir al Balah and Khan Yunis are currently on hold until further notice. The Logistics Cluster also facilitates transport services from Rafah to the Logistics Cluster common warehouses in Gaza. Additionally, a cargo notification service is available to inform partners once their cargo has arrived at the Rafah handover point. In Egypt, the Logistics Cluster facilitates common storage services in Port Said with 800 pallet positions.

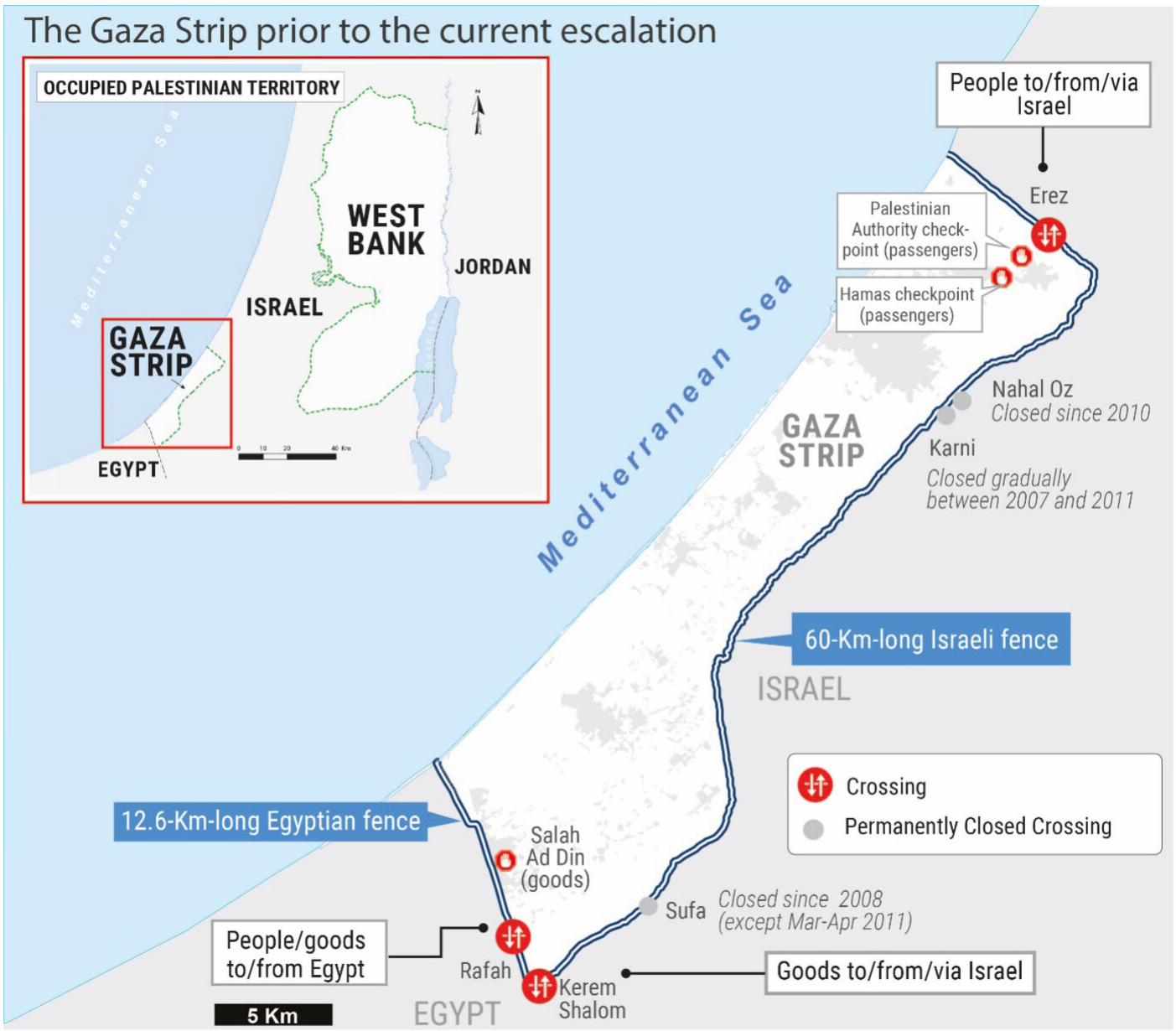
Emergency Telecommunications

- The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) and its partners continue to engage with the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) for authorization to import telecommunications equipment and set up an independent, efficient, and reliable communications platform for humanitarian responders.

- The ETC met for a technical engagement with UNDSS in Jerusalem on 18 December and discussed the status of the Very High Frequency (VHF) radio network security communications system (SCS) in Gaza, which has four repeaters in Jabalya, Gaza city, Khan Yunis, and Rafah. Only Khan Yunis and Rafah were functional when the system was reactivated on 3 December, and the Khan Yunis repeater broke down on 13 December and is currently inaccessible because of the prevailing insecurity.

- On 18 December, ETC partner, REACH, completed a communications and information needs assessment for the population in Gaza using the secondary data review methodology of all available data from sources on the ground. The report was shared with all ETC global partners on 22 December to inform and guide humanitarian responders on their current and planned activities in Gaza.

Protection against sexual abuse and exploitation (PSEA) remains a cross-cutting priority for all clusters. The SAWA helpline, reachable at 121 and through WhatsApp at +972 59-4040121 (East Jerusalem at 1-800-500-121), operates 24/7. This toll-free number is widely disseminated across all areas of intervention to report cases of SEA and to facilitate emergency counselling and referrals for affected communities to access life-saving services. The PSEA Network monitors calls daily and will increase the number of counsellors if necessary.



* Asterisks indicate that a figure, sentence, or section has been rectified, added, or retracted after the initial publication of this update.